

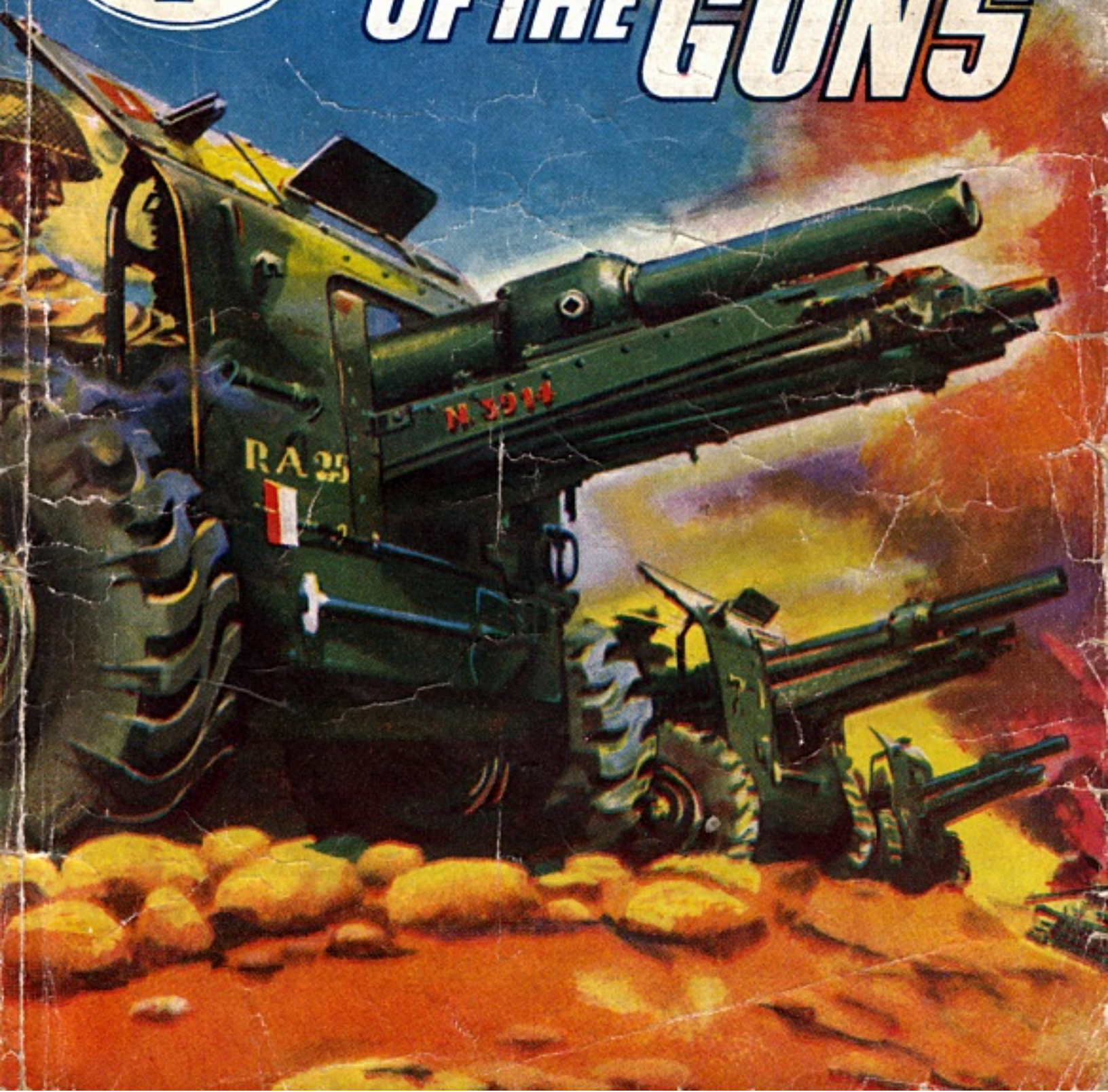
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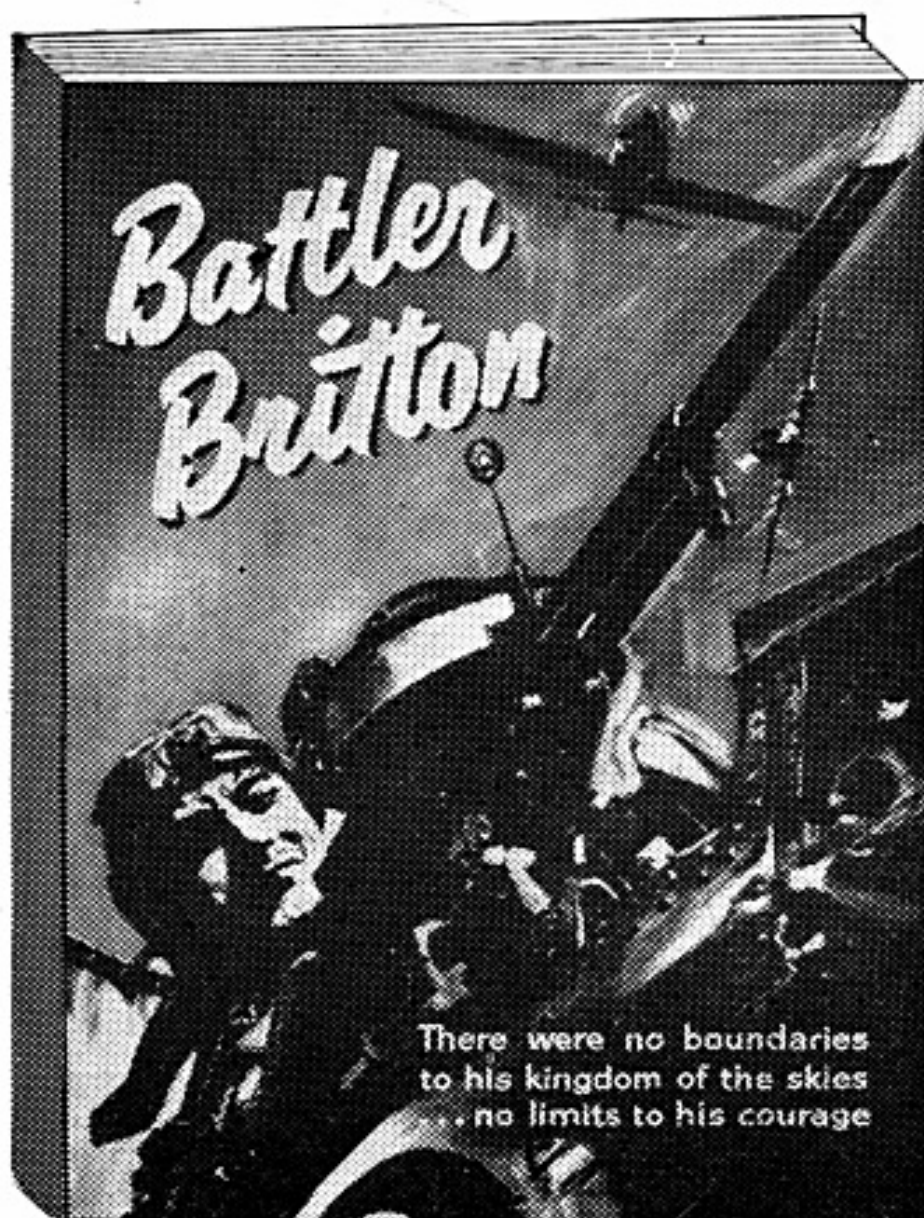
# ***THE VOICE OF THE GUNS***





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# THE VOICE *of the* GUNS

IN 1941, THE FIERCE TIDE OF WAR EBBED AND FLOWED ACROSS THE BARREN WASTES OF THE WESTERN DESERT. AS THE GERMAN AFRIKA KORPS GRAPPLED WITH THE SMALLER BUT INDOMITABLE EIGHTH ARMY, THE GERMAN PANZERS SOON LEARNED TO FEAR ONE WEAPON IN PARTICULAR . . . THE TWENTY-FIVE POUNDER GUN!





# Chapter 1. OPEN SIGHTS

SMALL 'FLYING COLUMNS' OF TWENTY-FIVE POUNDERS RANGED THE DESERT, WREAKING DESTRUCTION AMONGST ROMMEL'S TANKS...



THEY'RE  
TURNING TAIL,  
SIR... THEY'VE  
'AD ENOUGH!

SEVEN OF 'EM  
WON'T BE GOING  
BACK THOUGH! THAT  
BRINGS OUR BAG TO  
TWENTY-THREE ON THIS  
TRIP, SERGEANT-  
MAJOR!

ROMMEL'S FURY KNEW NO BOUNDS WHEN HE LEARNED THAT STILL MORE OF HIS PANZERS HAD FALLEN TO THE 'GIPSY GUNS', AS HE NAMED THE 25-POUNDERS.



SO! IN THREE DAYS WE LOSE  
TWENTY-THREE TANKS TO FOUR  
MISERABLE GIPSY GUNS!

THEY TOOK  
US COMPLETELY  
BY SURPRISE,  
MEIN GENERAL!



THE GERMAN  
COMMANDER'S  
EYES HARDENED.  
THESE IMPUDENT  
GUNNERS MUST  
BE TAUGHT A  
SHARP LESSON...

THIS FLYING COLUMN  
MUST BE DESTROYED...  
**AT ALL COSTS!**  
NOW, GENTLEMEN,  
THIS IS WHAT YOU  
WILL DO...



MEANWHILE, BLISSFULLY UNAWARE OF THE PLANS THAT THE 'DESERT FOX' WAS  
MAKING FOR THEIR DESTRUCTION, THE JUBILANT BRITISH GUNNERS WERE KEEPING A  
RENDEZVOUS WITH A SUPPLY TRUCK.

COME ON, ME LUCKY LADS...  
SOONER IT'S DONE THE SOONER  
YOU GET YOUR MAIL...  
HELLO, WHO'S THIS?



I BROUGHT UP  
A REPLACEMENT,  
SAR MAJOR...  
LANCE-BOMBARDIER  
LEASON-BLOOMIN'  
-JOYCE. ETON,  
'ARROW, OXFORD,  
CAMBRIDGE  
SANDHURST...  
THE LOT!



THE NEW ARRIVAL, TIM LEASON-JOYCE, REDDENED AT THE DRIVER'S MOCKING INTRODUCTION . . . AND AT THE SMILE IT BROUGHT TO THE FACE OF SERGEANT-MAJOR RIDLEY. HE HAD ALREADY LEARNED THAT A PUBLIC-SCHOOL BACKGROUND, AN OXFORD ACCENT AND A DOUBLE-BARRELLED NAME TOOK SOME LIVING DOWN WHEN YOU WERE IN THE RANKS.



THE HARD-BITTEN SERGEANT-MAJOR, A REGULAR OF MANY YEARS' SERVICE, WAS TOUCHY ABOUT HIS AITCHES! A BORN SOLDIER, LACK OF POLISH AND EDUCATION HAD KEPT HIM FROM A COMMISSION AND THE THOUGHT THAT TIM WAS SNEERING AT HIM MADE HIM SEETHE INWARDLY.

RIGHT, LEASON-JOYCE - WHEREVER YOU WENT TO SCHOOL - WE MUCK IN HERE REGARDLESS OF RANK - SO GET YOUR KIT OFF AND HELP UNLOAD THAT TRUCK!



FOR A BRIEF MOMENT THE TWO STARED AT EACH OTHER WITH AN INSTANT DISLIKE.





RED-FACED, TIM DOUBLED OVER TO WHERE THE GRINNING GUNNERS WERE UNLOADING THE TRUCK. THEY HAD HEARD EVERYTHING. . . AND THE NEW ARRIVAL RECEIVED A RIBALD GREETING. . .

WELCOME TO THE DESERT, LAD!  
THE LORD! IF WE'D  
KNOWN YOU WAS  
COMING, WE'D 'AVE  
HAD IT DUSTED!

I SAY, OLD CHAP,  
JOLLY NAICE TO  
SEE YOU,  
WHAT!



THE NEXT MINUTE, THE  
JOKERS GOT A SHOCK!

WOTCHER, ME OL'  
CHINAS! PLEASD  
TER MEETCHER!

OW!  
LEGGO!





# The Voice of the Guns

THERE WAS A ROAR LIKE AN ANGRY BULL AS THE SERGEANT-MAJOR CAME STRIDING OVER...

WHAT THE BLAZES ARE YOU PLAYING AT? THERE'S A WAR ON OUT HERE... IT'S NOT SOME O.T.C. RAG! I'D EXPECT AN N.C.O. TO 'AVE MORE SENSE!

YES, SIR!

IT WAS OUR FAULT, SIR!

WE WERE TAKING THE MICKEY A BIT, SIR!

AS RIDLEY STRODE AWAY, TIM GAZED AFTER HIM WITH BLAZING EYES. TO HIM IT SEEMED THAT THE SERGEANT-MAJOR HAD SEIZED A CHANCE TO HUMILIATE HIM RIGHT FROM THE START.

DON'T WORRY, TIM... BILL RIDLEY'S BARK'S A LOT WORSE THAN HIS BITE.

HE'S RIGHT TOO IN A WAY. THIS AIN'T A VERY HEALTHY SPOT TO BE HANGING AROUND IN FOR ANY LONGER THAN WE CAN HELP.

THAT'S ALL RIGHT, BOYS... AND THANKS FOR TRYING TO COVER UP BUT I RECKON HE'S GOT IT IN FOR ME!





THE GUNNER SPOKE TRUER THAN HE REALISED FOR, EVEN AT THAT MOMENT, THE POWERFUL GLASSES OF AN OFFICER IN A PATROLLING GERMAN ARMoured VEHICLE WERE BEING TRAINED ON THE SMALL BRITISH FORCE . . .

SO . . . A FLYING  
COLUMN OF THE ACCURSED  
GIPSY GUNS! PASS THEIR EXACT  
POSITION BACK TO  
PANZER H.Q.!

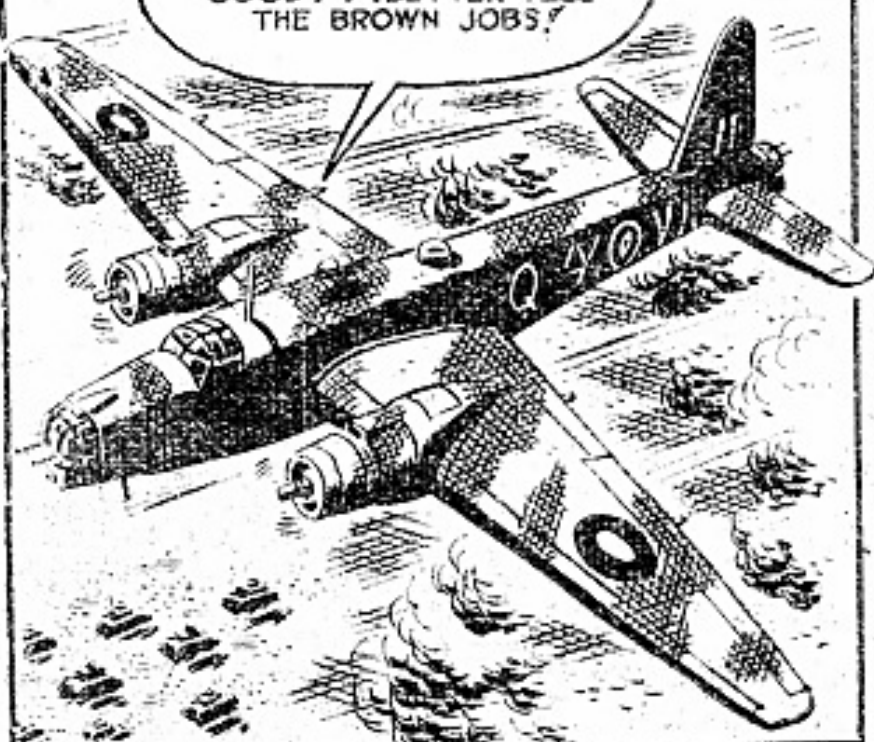


SOON A POWERFUL FORCE OF HEAVY  
PANZERS WAS ROLLING RELENTLESSLY  
TOWARDS THE GUNNERS' POSITION . . .



IT SO HAPPENED THAT HIGH ABOVE THE DESERT, A WELLINGTON BOMBER WAS RETURNING FROM A RAID ON BENGHAZI. IT'S CREW SPOTTED THE GERMAN ARMOUR . . .

HEY! LOOK AT THOSE TANKS! THEY'RE UP TO NO GOOD . . . BETTER TELL THE BROWN JOBS!



AT EIGHTH ARMY H.Q. . . .

THE REPORT SAYS TWELVE TANKS ARE HEADING STRAIGHT FOR THE FLYING COLUMN. WE'VE GOT HERE!



HMM! WARN THE COLUMN TO PULL OUT RIGHT AWAY. . . THEY WON'T STAND A CHANCE AGAINST A FORCE LIKE THAT!

THE WARNING OF THE IMMINENT ATTACK WAS FLASHED TO THE FLYING COLUMN . . .

SIGNAL FROM H.Q., SIR. PRIORITY IMMEDIATE!

TRUST THEM TO CALL WHEN WE'VE JUST BREWED UP. . . PROBABLY WANT AMMO RETURNS!





BIG PANZER FORCE HEADING YOUR WAY... LOOKS AS IF THEY'RE OUT FOR YOUR BLOOD. YOU ARE NOT... REPEAT **NOT**... TO ENGAGE THEM. FALL BACK IMMEDIATELY!

BUT, SIR, WE COULD SURELY KNOCK OUT A FEW BEFORE...

YOU WILL WITHDRAW... **NOW. THAT'S AN ORDER!**



BY THUNDER! THEY'VE GOT US SURROUNDED!

SHALL I PREPARE FOR ACTION, SIR?

RELUCTANTLY THE YOUNG LIEUTENANT GAVE THE ORDER TO PULL BACK. BUT ALREADY THE HUGE COLUMN OF PANZERS HAD SPLIT TO FORM THE JAWS OF A PINCHER... **AND THE FLYING COLUMN WAS BETWEEN THOSE STEEL JAWS...**

**YOU BET!**

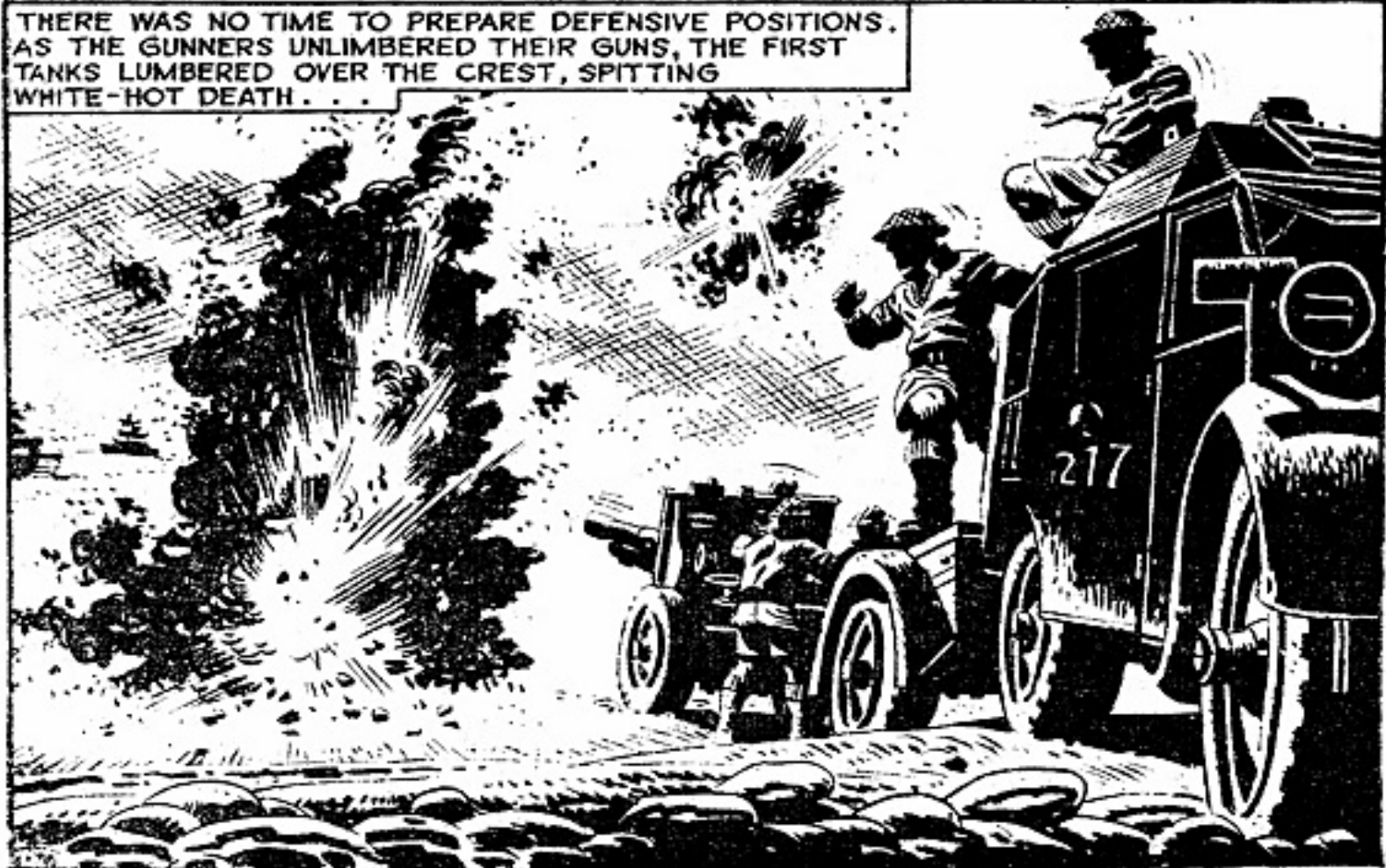


THE SERGEANT-MAJOR RACED BACK  
TO THE GUN-TOWERS . . .

HALT...  
ACTION  
FRONT!  
TANKS!



THERE WAS NO TIME TO PREPARE DEFENSIVE POSITIONS.  
AS THE GUNNERS UNLIMBERED THEIR GUNS, THE FIRST  
TANKS LUMBERED OVER THE CREST, SPITTING  
WHITE-HOT DEATH . . .





**IN THE FIRST MOMENTS OF THE ACTION, DISASTER STRUCK!**



**A DIRECT HIT...  
THE SKIPPER'S  
HAD IT!**

SERGEANT-MAJOR BILL RIDLEY'S MOUTH SET LIKE A STEEL TRAP. HE AND THE YOUNG OFFICER HAD BEEN TOGETHER SINCE THE START OF THE DESERT CAMPAIGN

THEY'VE KILLED THE  
SKIPPER, LADS...  
BUT WE'LL MAKE  
'EM PAY!

SIX HUNDRED...  
FIVE-FIFTY...

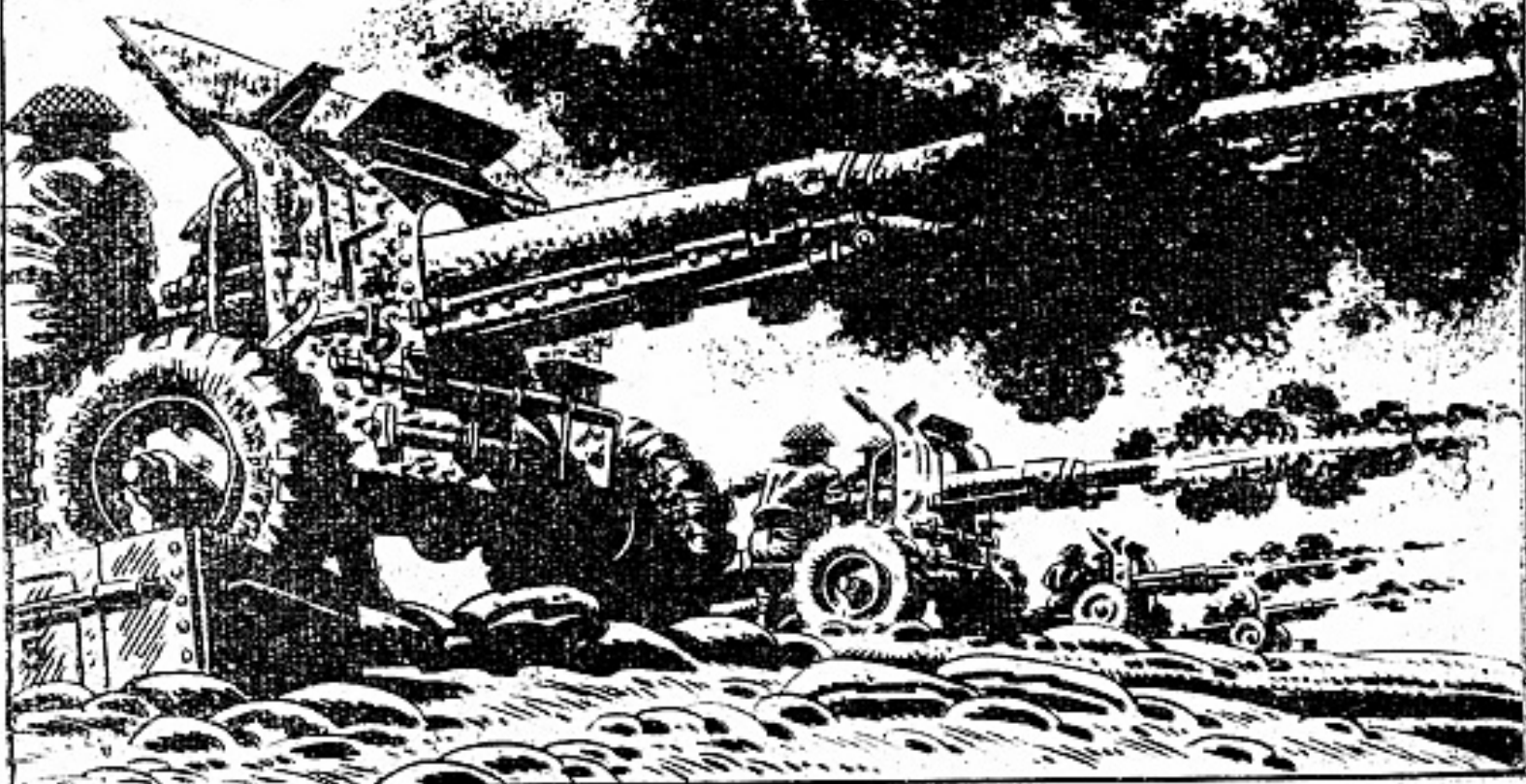


NEARER... NEARER THE GERMAN  
TANKS THUNDERED. THEN...

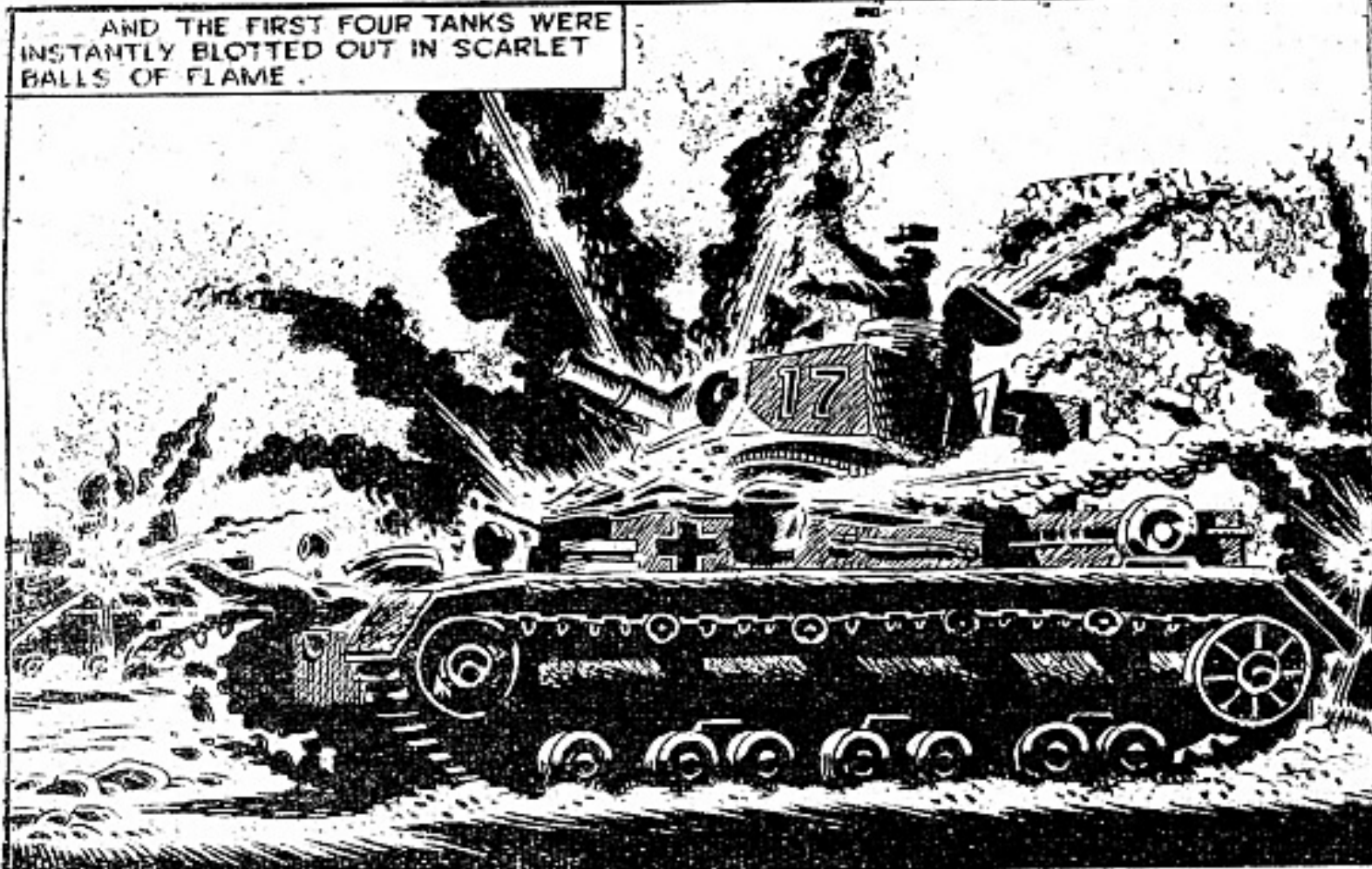
**FIRE!**



FLAME STABBED FROM THE MUZZLES  
OF THE FOUR TWENTY-FIVE POUNDERS  
AS THEY SPOKE WITH ONE VOICE . . .



AND THE FIRST FOUR TANKS WERE  
INSTANTLY BLOTTED OUT IN SCARLET  
BALLS OF FLAME . . .





THE SWIFT AND DEADLY FIRE OF THE GUNNERS WAS TAKING A HEAVY TOLL. BUT STILL THE GERMAN TANKS ROARED IN . . . AND THE GUNNERS WERE PAYING A GRIM PRICE . . .

SAR'NT SMITHERS SEND TWO OF YOUR MEN TO WORK THIS GUN!



BILL RIDLEY SEEMED ENDOWED WITH INEXHAUSTIBLE STRENGTH, RACING FROM GUN TO GUN WITH AMMUNITION, HELPING THE WOUNDED, DIRECTING FIRE . . . HE WAS EVERYWHERE AT ONCE! BUT SHELLS WERE RUNNING LOW . . .

MAKE THE MOST OF THESE ROUNDS, LEASON-JOYCE . . . IT'S THE LOT! AFTER THAT . . .



ISN'T THERE SOMETHING WE CAN DO, SERGEANT-MAJOR?

EVEN IN THE HEAT AND SMOKE OF BATTLE, THE HOSTILITY BETWEEN THE TWO FLARED AGAIN.

WE'LL FIGHT TO THE LAST ROUND . . . THEN DESTROY THE GUNS AND SURRENDER. YOU GOT ANY BETTER IDEAS?



WE'VE GOT PLENTY OF SMOKE SHELLS LEFT. WE COULD LAY DOWN A SMOKE SCREEN AND PULL OUT UNDER ITS COVER!

BILL RIDLEY CURSED HIMSELF INWARDLY FOR FORGETTING THE SMOKE SHELLS EVERY TROOP CARRIED. . . HE WHEELED AND SNATCHED UP A MAP CASE . . .

RIGHT! WE'LL LAY DOWN A SMOKE-SCREEN, AND AS SOON AS I GIVE THE ORDER, THREE GUNS WILL PULL OUT. I'M RELYING ON YOU TO LEAD THEM BACK TO BRIGADE POSITION!

WHAT HAPPENS TO NUMBER FOUR GUN?

I'LL STAY WITH IT. . . WE'LL TRY TO KEEP JERRY BUSY WHILE YOU'RE PULLING OUT.



SOON A DENSE WALL OF SMOKE LAY BETWEEN THE GUNS AND THE TANKS AND UNDER ITS COVER, THREE OF THE TWENTY-FIVE POUNDERS WERE HASTILY LIMBERED UP.

GOOD LUCK, SAR-MAJOR.

THIS IS NO TIME FOR GOODBYE KISSES. . . GET TO HECK OUT OF IT!





EVERY TANK THAT VENTURED TO GROPE THROUGH THE THICK PALL OF SMOKE WAS A SITTING TARGET FOR THE REMAINING GUN . . .



BUT INEVITABLY THE SMOKE BEGAN TO LIFT AND THE TANKS CLOSED IN GREEDILY FOR THE KILL.



WORKING FRANTICALLY, THEY HITCHED UP THE GUN AND BUMPING AND SWAYING MADLY, THE QUAD RACED OVER THE SAND. CHEATED OF THEIR PREY, THE GERMAN TANKS SENT A FURIOUS SALVO OF HATE AFTER IT . . .



AS CLOUDS OF PAIN-FILLED BLACKNESS CLAMPED DOWN ON BILL RIDLEY'S BRAIN, HE SUMMONED THE LAST RESOURCES OF HIS EBBING STRENGTH TO GASP A HOARSE COMMAND TO THE DRIVER.

LET'S STOP AND  
FIX A DRESSING ON  
THAT WOUND,  
SAR-MAJOR.

KEEP GOING,  
KEEP GOING...  
BEARING SIX-FIVE  
DEGREES! AN ORDER  
...UN'RSTAN'...

A FEW HOURS LATER, THE QUAD RACED  
INTO THE BRITISH FORWARD LINES...

THE REST OF YOUR  
MOB CAME THROUGH  
AN HOUR AGO.

GET A STRETCHER  
UP HERE...  
DOUBLE QUICK!





MEANWHILE, TIM LEASON-JOYCE REPORTED THE ACTION AT REGIMENTAL H.Q.

... THE TANKS WERE ABOUT TO OVER-RUN US, WHEN SERGEANT-MAJOR RIDLEY PUT DOWN A SMOKE-SCREEN AND HELD THE JERRIES OFF WITH ONE GUN WHILE WE PULLED OUT. . .

JUST WHAT I'D HAVE EXPECTED OF RIDLEY! THE REGIMENT'S LOST A FINE SOLDIER, AND YOU'VE DONE WELL IN YOUR FIRST ACTION, BOMBARDIER!

BUT IT TOOK MORE THAN A SHELL SPLINTER TO KILL A MAN OF BILL RIDLEY'S FIBRE! A WEEK LATER IN THE LUXURY OF THE BASE HOSPITAL IN CAIRO . . .

WHEN CAN I GET UP, SIR? I'VE GOT TO GET BACK TO MY UNIT!

AS SOON AS YOU'RE A BIT STRONGER . . . I'VE BROUGHT SOME NEWS THAT MIGHT HELP!

AS THE R.A.M.C. COLONEL READ THE CITATION IN A DELIBERATELY FLAT VOICE, BILL RIDLEY'S HEART MISSED A BEAT.

... IS AWARDED THE D.C.M. AND GRANTED AN IMMEDIATE COMMISSION WITH THE RANK OF LIEUTENANT . . .

ME... AN OFFICER!

## Chapter 2. OBSERVATION TEAM

BILL RIDLEY'S RECOVERY WAS RAPID AND COMPLETE. AFTER A SHORT COURSE AT AN OFFICER'S TRAINING UNIT, HE REJOINED HIS OLD REGIMENT. THE TOUGH REGULAR'S HEART SWELLED WITH PRIDE AS THE COLONEL GREETED HIM BACK . . . AS A BROTHER OFFICER.

DARNED GLAD TO HAVE YOU BACK, BILL. COME ON OVER TO THE MESS FOR A DRINK!

THANK YOU, SIR!



YOU'VE COME BACK JUST AT THE RIGHT TIME, BILL! THE WHOLE REGIMENT MOVES OFF ON A FLYING COLUMN JOB TOMORROW . . . TO HIT JERRY WHEREVER WE CAN CATCH HIM.

THAT SUITS ME, SIR!





I'VE HEARD THAT THE HUN'S BEEN  
PRETTY ACTIVE ROUND THIS AREA...  
WE OUGHT TO GET A BIT OF SHOOTING  
PRACTICE THERE. I'M GIVING YOU  
'F' TROOP, BY THE WAY.



BILL FELT A GLOW OF PRIDE WHEN HE  
LEARNED THAT HE WAS TO BE GIVEN COMMAND  
OF A TROOP IMMEDIATELY. BUT HE COULD NOT  
REPRESS A DISMAYED GASP AT THE COLONEL'S  
NEXT WORDS.

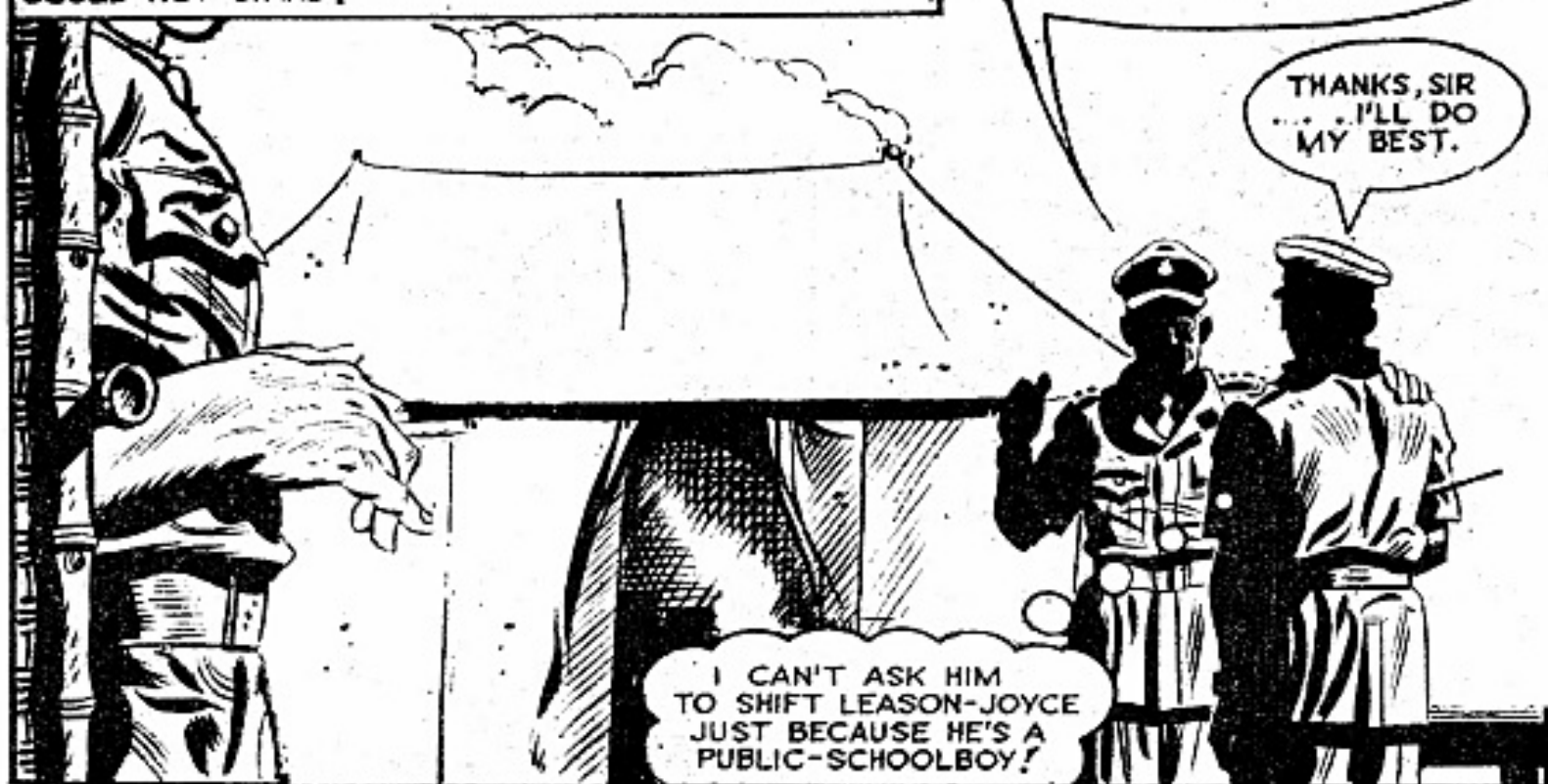
AS A TROOP COMMANDER YOU'LL BE DOING  
MAINLY OBSERVATION POST WORK, OF COURSE.  
'F' TROOP HAVE GOT QUITE A GOOD O.P. TEAM, I  
BELIEVE. YOU'LL HAVE AN EXCELLENT ASSISTANT  
... BOMBARDIER LEASON - JOYCE!



BILL GROANED INWARDLY. AN OBSERVATION TEAM WAS  
AS CLOSE-KNIT AS ANY FAMILY, FIGHTING, SLEEPING  
AND LIVING TOGETHER. AND HIS RIGHT-HAND MAN  
WAS TO BE THE ONE MAN IN THE ARMY THAT HE  
COULD NOT STAND!

I'M GOING TO GET A BIT OF  
SHUT-EYE; WE START AT FIRST  
LIGHT TOMORROW. GOOD LUCK,  
BILL... I'M EXPECTING GREAT  
THINGS FROM YOU.

THANKS, SIR  
... I'LL DO  
MY BEST.



I CAN'T ASK HIM  
TO SHIFT LEASON-JOYCE  
JUST BECAUSE HE'S A  
PUBLIC-SCHOOLBOY!

AS BILL LEFT THE MESS, HE COLLIDED WITH A HURRYING FIGURE . . .



AS BOMBARDIER TIM LEASON-JOYCE SPRANG TO ATTENTION, BILL MADE A SUPREME EFFORT TO TRY TO BRIDGE THE GAP THAT LAY BETWEEN THEM. HE HELD OUT HIS HAND . . . BUT TIM'S FACE WAS A FROZEN MASK. HE REMAINED RIGIDLY AT ATTENTION.

GLAD YOU GOT OUT OF THE LAST SHOW ALIVE. I'M TAKING OVER 'F' TROOP, SO WE'LL BE IN THE SAME O.P. PARTY.

YES, SIR!



IF I LOWER MY GUARD, HE'LL DROP ON ME LIKE A TON OF BRICKS!

RIDLEY FLUSHED ANGRILY AS HIS SILENT OFFER OF FRIENDSHIP WAS IGNORED. THEN HE SHRUGGED. IF THE COCKY YOUNG TYKE WANTED TO BE REGIMENTAL . . . THEN SO COULD BILL RIDLEY!

I'LL BE ALONG TO INSPECT EVERYTHING IN HALF AN HOUR . . . AND IT HAD BETTER BE ALL RIGHT!

YES, SIR!





EXACTLY THIRTY MINUTES LATER, BILL STRODE OVER TO WHERE THE O.P. TRUCK WAS DRAWN UP.

GLAD TO SEE YOU BACK, SIR!

THANKS, WEST. . . ARE THEY STILL LETTING YOU DRIVE? WHO'S THIS?

SIGNALLER GREEN, SIR. . . JUST OUT FROM ENGLAND!

GRUDGINGLY BILL ADMITTED TO HIMSELF THAT THERE WAS LITTLE TO CRITICISE ABOUT TIM'S PREPARATION OF THE O.P. TRUCK. . . UNTIL HE SWITCHED ON THE RADIO!

WHAT THE . . . WHY ISN'T THIS RADIO ON NET?

S. . . SORRY, SIR. . . MUST HAVE TURNED THE DIAL ACCIDENTALLY!

WE'LL MEET AGAIN.



BILL'S EYES BLAZED WITH GENUINE ANGER. IN A FIGHTING REGIMENT, IT WAS UNFORGIVABLE FOR A RADIO TO BE OFF ITS REGIMENTAL FREQUENCY.

BOMBARDIER... SEE THAT THIS SET IS RETUNED... AND STAYS ON NET FROM NOW. THIS IS A WEAPON OF WAR... NOT A FORCES COMFORT!

IT SHAN'T HAPPEN AGAIN, SIR!

THE THREE RANKERS STARED IN SILENCE AFTER THEIR NEW COMMANDER AS HE STALKED AWAY...

LUMME... A COMMISSION SEEMS TO HAVE CHANGED HIM... HE USED TO BE ONE OF THE BEST!

SORRY ABOUT THE SET, BOMBARDIER!

FORGET IT, BADGER. AT LEAST IT'S SHOWN ME WHERE I STAND WITH OUR NEW SKIPPER!





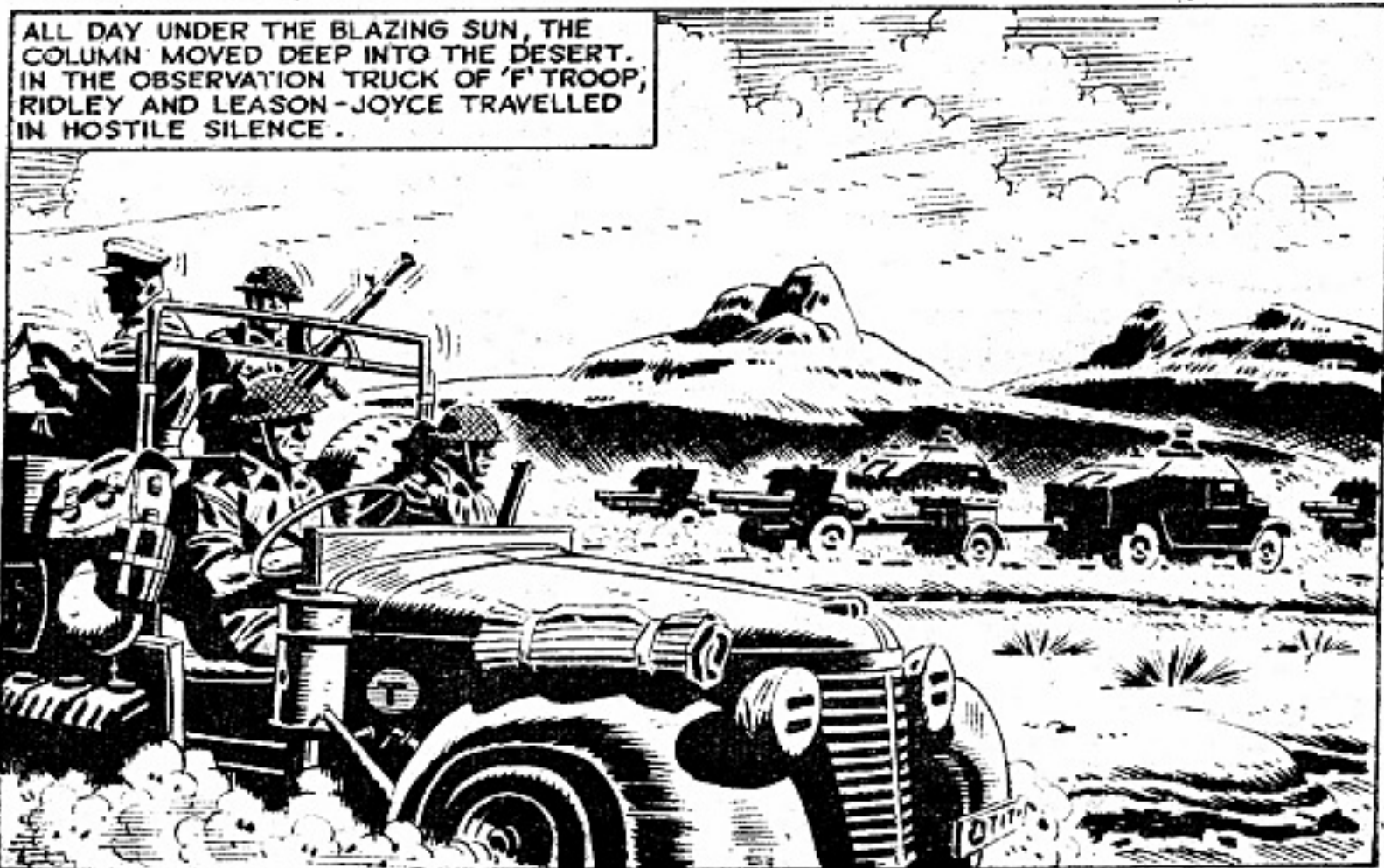
AT FIRST LIGHT NEXT MORNING, THE REGIMENT PREPARED TO MOVE WESTWARDS IN SEARCH OF ACTION.

WE TRAVEL ON A BEARING OF TWO-EIGHT-FIVE DEGREES, SIR. SHALL I MARK YOUR MAP FOR YOU?

I DIDN'T GO TO WINCHESTER BUT I CAN STILL MARK A COURSE ON A MAP, THANK YOU!



ALL DAY UNDER THE BLAZING SUN, THE COLUMN MOVED DEEP INTO THE DESERT. IN THE OBSERVATION TRUCK OF 'F' TROOP, RIDLEY AND LEASON-JOYCE TRAVELLED IN HOSTILE SILENCE.



LATE IN THE AFTERNOON, THE RADIO CRACKLED INTO URGENT LIFE . . .

SUNRAY TO  
DOGSTAR . . .  
ORDERS . . .  
OVER!

DOGSTAR TO  
SUNRAY . . .  
READY . . .  
OVER!

GET  
READY TO  
DECODE!



TIM DECODED THE MESSAGE ALMOST AS QUICKLY AS IT CAME THROUGH.

WHAT'S THE  
FORM?



'F' TROOP TO  
DEPLOY SOUTH AND  
TO COVER THE AGHAM  
TRACK, SIR. ENEMY  
MOVEMENT ALONG IT.

WITH A WAVE OF HIS ARM, BILL SWUNG 'F' TROOP AWAY FROM THE MAIN BODY, SOUTHWARD'S. WITH UNERRING JUDGMENT, HE LED THEM ACROSS THE TRACKLESS WASTE. THEN, JUST BEFORE NIGHTFALL . . .

RIGHT . . . TELL THE  
GUNS TO DIG IN  
HERE. WE'LL HAVE  
OUR O.P. ON  
THAT HILL . . .  
JEBEL OMAR!

YES, SIR!

HE MAY BE  
AN OAF, BUT HE'S  
A DARNED FINE  
NAVIGATOR!





THANKS TO BILL'S UNCANNILY ACCURATE NAVIGATION, THE GUNS WERE IN POSITION AND THE O.P. ESTABLISHED BEFORE NIGHTFALL.

WE'VE GOT A GOOD VIEW OF THE TRACK FROM HERE. WE'LL MAINTAIN A TWENTY-FOUR HOUR WATCH. COMMUNICATIONS OKAY?

CONTACT ESTABLISHED, SIR.

RIGHT...  
GET A BREW-UP  
GOING. I'LL TAKE  
FIRST SHIFT.

DURING THE LONG HOURS OF THE NEXT DAY, THE TRACK WAS UNDER CONSTANT OBSERVATION. BUT THERE WAS NO SIGN OF LIFE UNTIL LATE AFTERNOON. TIM HAD JUST RELIEVED BILL...

A TARGET AT LAST!  
LOOKS AS IF HE'S  
BROKEN DOWN... WONDER  
IF I SHOULD CALL  
RIDLEY, OR HAVE A  
GO MYSELF?

FOR A MOMENT, TIM HESITATED. THEN HIS JAW TIGHTENED. HE SEIZED THE FIELD TELEPHONE...

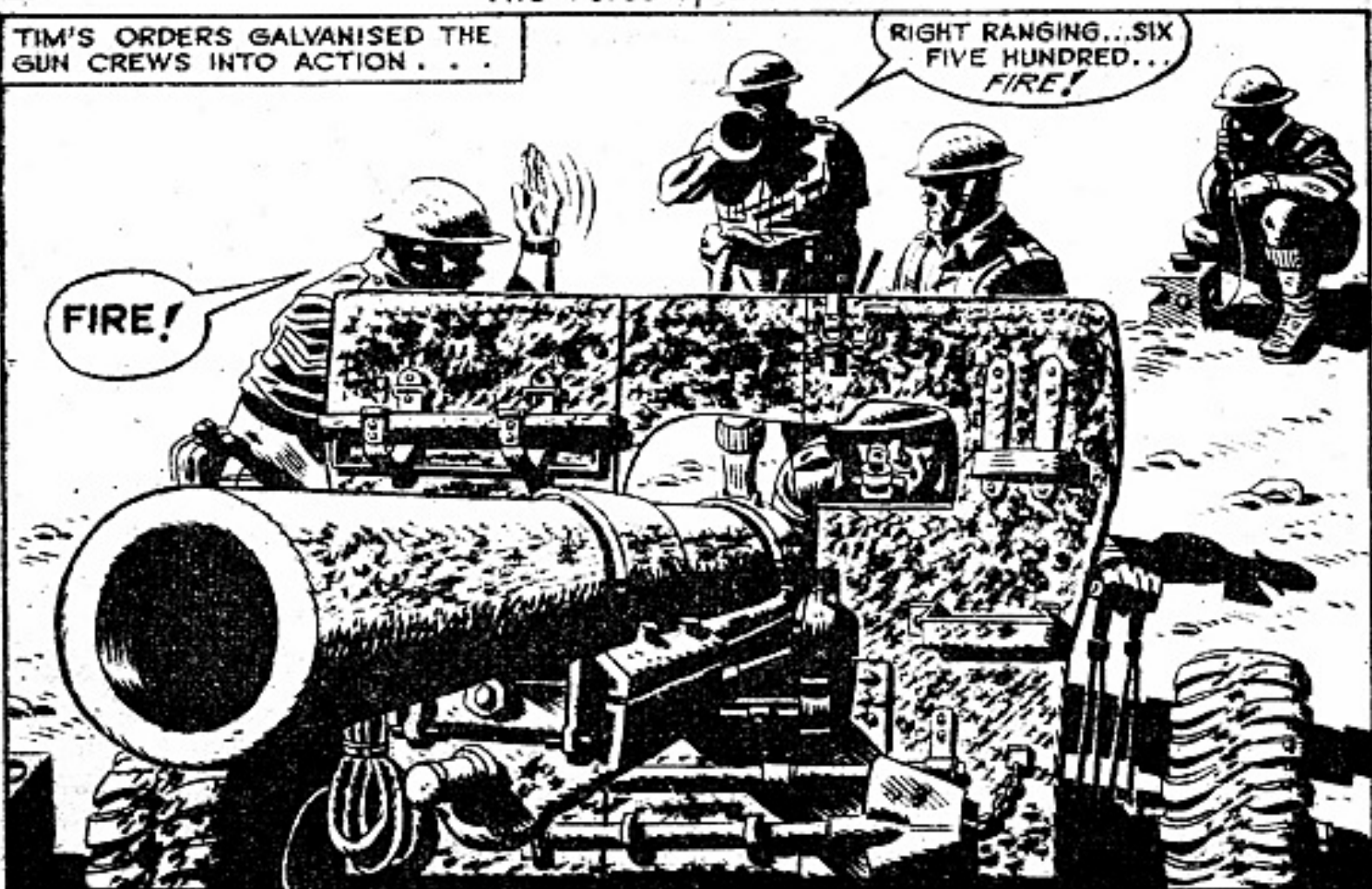
I'LL SHOW HIM  
I CAN TAKE A  
SHOOT AS WELL  
AS HE CAN!

TROOP  
TARGET!

TIM'S ORDERS GALVANISED THE  
GUN CREWS INTO ACTION . . .

RIGHT RANGING...SIX  
FIVE HUNDRED...  
FIRE!

FIRE!



TIM'S HEART LEAPT  
EXULTANTLY AS HIS  
RANGING SHOTS STRADDLED  
THE MOTIONLESS TARGET...

ONE PLUS, ONE  
MINUS...I'VE  
GOT THE RANGE  
NICELY.

SIX-SIX-  
FIFTY...  
FIVE ROUNDS  
GUNFIRE!





THE GERMAN TRUCK WAS ALMOST INSTANTLY REDUCED TO A BLAZING WRECK. BUT TIM'S SATISFACTION WAS SHORT-LIVED. THE TELEPHONE WAS WRENCHED FROM HIS HAND AND HE TURNED TO STARE INTO THE FURIOUS EYES OF BILL RIDLEY . . .

**CEASE FIRE!**  
WHAT THE BLAZES ARE YOU PLAYING AT, BOMBARDIER?

SHOOTING UP JERRY M.T., SIR . . . AS ORDERED!

TIM BRIDLED AT ONCE AT THE FURIOUS OUTBURST . . .

SORRY, SIR . . . IF I'D KNOWN YOU WANTED TO TAKE THE SHOOT I'D HAVE CALLED YOU!

IT'S NOT THAT, YOU YOUNG FOOL! YOU'VE WASTED TWENTY PRECIOUS ROUNDS ON ONE MISERABLE TRUCK THAT WE COULD HAVE STALKED AND PUT OUT WITH A BREN! D'YOU THINK AMMO GROWS ON TREES AROUND HERE?



THE INCIDENT HELPED TO WIDEN THE RIFT BETWEEN THE TWO. THE EVENING MEAL WAS EATEN IN MOODY SILENCE. AND AN ATTEMPT TO BRIGHTEN THINGS UP BY JACKIE WEST MET WITH NO SUCCESS.

PUT A SOCK IN THAT AWFUL ROW, WEST, FOR PETE'S SAKE!

SORRY, SIR . . . I THOUGHT YOU ENJOYED THE OLD MOUTH-ORGAN!



NEXT MORNING, TIM WAS EXCITEDLY GREETED BY BADGER GREEN WHO WAS TUNING HIS BELOVED RADIO.

LISTEN, BOMBARDIER. . . I'VE PICKED UP A JERRY, AND HE AIN'T HALF JABBERIN' AWAY!

YOU'D BETTER GET ON NET. . . HEY. . . GIVE ME THAT HEADSET QUICK!



WATCHED BY THE PUZZLED SIGNALLER, TIM BEGAN SCRIBBLING HURRIEDLY AS HE LISTENED TO THE GUTTURAL GERMAN VOICE.

WHAT IS IT, BOM. . . WHAT'S HE SAYING?

IT'S A MESSAGE FROM A HUN BRIGADE H.Q. . . . AND THE CLOTS ARE SENDING IN CLEAR!





TIM'S EYES GLEAMED AS THE MESSAGE TOOK SHAPE. IT WAS AN ORDER TO MOVE... AND THE NEW POSITION WAS TO BE ONLY A FEW MILES FROM 'F' TROOP'S GUNS! BREATHLESSLY, HE RACED UP TO WHERE BILL RIDLEY WAS WATCHING THE ROAD...

HAVE YOU GONE CRACKERS... OR ARE YOU TRYING TO PULL MY LEG? ANYWAY... WHERE DID YOU LEARN GERMAN?

WE JUST INTERCEPTED THIS MESSAGE, SIR AND I LEARNED GERMAN AT WINCHESTER!



FOR A LONG MINUTE, RIDLEY WEIGHED THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MESSAGE...

IT'S ALMOST TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE! PROBABLY A TRAP... YET IT COULD BE SOME FOOL SIGNALLER WHO FORGOT TO PUT THE ORDER INTO CODE. NOT ALL THE MUGS ARE ON OUR SIDE.



THE OFFICER SWIFTLY MADE UP HIS MIND.

RIGHT... THIS IS BIG ENOUGH TO CALL THE WHOLE REGIMENT ON BUT IF IT ISN'T THE REAL MCCOY YOU'LL BE SORRY!



THE MOMENT THE MESSAGE WAS PASSED BACK TO THE REGIMENT, 'F' TROOP OBSERVATION TRUCK NOSED FORWARD IN SEARCH OF THE ENEMY. . .

THIS IS THE AREA . . . AND NOT A JERRY IN SIGHT. LOOKS LIKE WE'VE BEEN HAD . . . AND I'M THE BIGGEST FOOL FOR TAKING NOTICE OF YOU, BOMBARDIER!

SUDDENLY, TIM POINTED TO THE HORIZON . . .

LOOK, SIR . . . THAT DUST-CLOUD ON THE SKYLINE!

HMM . . . COULD BE DUST FROM TRANSPORT . . . OR A SANDSTORM! WE'LL TAKE A CLOSER LOOK!





BILL HALTED THE TRUCK FOR A MOMENT . . . AND THE DESERT AIR WAS FILLED WITH THE SULLEN ROAR OF ENGINES...

LISTEN TO THAT . . . JERRY TRUCKS . . . HUNDREDS OF 'EM! AND THEY'RE NOT COMING ANY NEARER . . . THEY'RE PROBABLY LEAGUERING UP!

THE REGIMENT SHOULD BE IN RANGE IN ABOUT AN HOUR!

THE BRITISH TRUCK PULLED INTO A WADI JUST BELOW THE CREST OF A RISING SLOPE OF SAND AND SUN-BLEACHED BOULDERS.

GOT THAT EIGHTEEN SET, BOMBARDIER . . . WE'LL TAKE A LOOK OVER THE CREST. WEST, GREEN . . . GET THE BREN DOWN IN CASE ANY NOSY SCOUT CAR COMES ROUND THIS WAY.



THE TWO MEN CAUTIOUSLY CLAMBERED TO THE TOP OF THE SLOPE AND PEERED OVER THE EDGE. THE SHALLOW DEPRESSION ON THE OTHER SIDE WAS SEETHING WITH GERMAN TRUCKS!

GUNS ARE JUST READY, SIR. . . SHALL I START TO PASS FIRE ORDERS?

JIMINY! LOOKS LIKE A COMPLETE BRIGADE OF JERRY INFANTRY. . . THE SORT OF TARGET A BLOKE DREAMS ABOUT!



NOT YET. . . WE'LL HOLD IT TILL ALL THE RATS ARE IN THE TRAP!



THE STREAM OF INCOMING VEHICLES BEGAN TO THIN OUT. . . THEN BILL'S VOICE CRACKED THE ORDER LIKE A WHIPLASH. . .

RIGHT. . . REGIMENTAL GUNFIRE TARGET!

THROUGH, SIR!





ONE RANGING SHOT WAS ENOUGH . . .

RIGHT  
ON  
TARGET!TEN ROUNDS  
GUNFIRE! THAT'LL  
DO FOR A  
START!

TENSELY THE TWO ARTILLERYMEN  
WAITED. ALREADY SOMETHING LIKE PANIC  
HAD BEGUN TO GRIP THE GERMANS IN  
THE LEAGUER. THEN, IN THE DISTANCE,  
THE REGIMENT'S TWENTY-FOUR GUNS  
RUMBLER LIKE THUNDER. THERE WAS A  
SIGHING MOAN AS THE SHELLS SPED  
OVERHEAD AND ALMOST INSTANTLY, THE  
ENEMY POSITION ERUPTED INTO AN  
INFERNO OF VIOLENT EXPLOSIONS!



THE ACRID SMOKE FROM THE FIRST SALVO CLEARED TO REVEAL A SCENE OF FRANTIC CONFUSION. THE GERMANS WERE RACING BLINDLY FOR UNDAMAGED TRUCKS, INTENT ONLY ON ONE THING... ESCAPE FROM THE VALLEY OF DEATH.

WAIT, HANS,  
WAIT FOR  
ME!

HALT, YOU  
COWARDLY SWINE  
...HALT!

THAT TRUCK'S  
FULL OF AMMUNITION  
...I'M NOT WAITING TO BE  
BLOWN TO PIECES!

THE AMMUNITION TRUCK  
EXPLODED WITH AN EARTH-  
SHAKING ROAR. GRIMLY BILL  
WATCHED THE HOLOCAUST...  
THEN RAPPED OUT ANOTHER  
ORDER. A GASP OF HORROR  
BROKE FROM TIM...

TEN ROUNDS  
GUNFIRE!

YOU CAN'T  
...IT'S  
MURDER...  
SHEER MURDER!



THE REGULAR TURNED SAVAGELY  
ON THE YOUNG BOMBARDIER . . .

DO YOU THINK I  
ENJOY THIS, YOU FOOL?  
BUT THIS IS WAR . . .  
NOT A CRICKET MATCH!  
**SEND THAT  
ORDER!**

HESITANTLY, TIM BEGAN TO TRANSMIT THE ORDER . . . THEN HE BROKE OFF, STRUCK  
BY A SUDDEN IDEA . . .

LOOK, SIR . . . WE KNOW THE JERRY'S RADIO  
FREQUENCY. I CAN SPEAK GERMAN . . .  
CAN'T WE GIVE 'EM  
A CHANCE TO  
SURRENDER?

HMM! WE COULD TRY IT,  
I SUPPOSE . . . BUT I DON'T  
RECKON IT'LL BE ANY USE.

## The Voice of the Guns

TIM SWIFTLY TUNED HIS RADIO TO THE ENEMY WAVELENGTH AND PASSED THE ORDER TO SURRENDER. FOR LONG MINUTES THEY WAITED FOR A REPLY, AND BILL'S LIPS TWISTED IN A BITTER GRIN.

SO MUCH FOR YOUR IDEA!  
YOU CAN'T FIGHT A  
WAR WITH KID  
GLOVES ON.

LOOK... OVER  
THERE! A WHITE  
FLAG!



IN OBEDIENCE TO FURTHER ORDERS OVER THE WIRELESS, THE UNWOUNDED GERMANS LAID DOWN THEIR WEAPONS AND THE BRITISH OFFICER AND THE BOMBARDIER STRODE FORWARD TO TAKE THE SURRENDER OF A COMPLETE BRIGADE.

SORRY  
IF MY IDEA'S  
SPOILED  
YOUR FUN,  
SIR!

LISTEN, YOU SMART-ALEC PUPPY... I'VE  
HAD ABOUT ALL I CAN TAKE FROM YOU!  
AS SOON AS WE'VE CLEARED THIS  
LOT WE'LL TAKE OFF OUR TUNICS  
AND RANK BADGES AND HAVE  
IT OUT, MAN TO MAN!

THERE'S  
NOTHING I'D  
LIKE BETTER  
SIR!





BUT THE TWO MEN SOON FOUND THEMSELVES WITH SOMETHING MORE IMPORTANT TO THINK ABOUT THAN THEIR PRIVATE QUARREL...

A JOLLY GOOD BAG FOR OUR LAST ACTION IN LIBYA, RIDLEY... A COMPLETE HUN BRIGADE!

LAST ACTION IN LIBYA... WHAT DO YOU MEAN, COLONEL?



IT SEEMS MUSSOLINI HAS BITTEN OFF MORE THAN HE CAN CHEW IN GREECE... SO HE'S CALLED ON HITLER FOR HELP. THE GERMANS ARE POURING IN FROM THE NORTH AND WE'RE GOING TO STOP THEM! WE PULL BACK TO THE DELTA TOMORROW!



# Chapter 3. ONE MUST DIE

THE GUNNERS HANDED OVER THEIR PRISONERS AND MOVED BACK TO THE NILE DELTA AREA. THERE THEY FOUND THEMSELVES PART OF A MIXED FORCE . . . ANZAC, BRITISH, INDIAN . . . THAT WAS TO RUSH TO THE AID OF A STRICKEN ALLY. GALLANT, PROVED WARRIORS . . . BUT PATHETICALLY FEW IN NUMBERS!

WHAT A WAR! STRAIGHT FROM THE DESERT ON TO A SHIP. . . NOT ONE BLOOMIN' NIGHT IN ALEX!

WHAT'S EATING YA, SPORT? IN PEACE-TIME, JOKERS **PAY** FOR A CRUISE TO GREECE!



AS BILL RIDLEY WAS SUPERVISING THE LOADING ON BOARD OF THE GUNS, HE FELT A TAP ON HIS SHOULDER . . .

LOOK LIVELY WITH THAT GUN . . .

I SAY, LADDIE, WHERE CAN I FIND 'F' TROOP COMMANDER?





BILL SWUNG ROUND AND STARED IN AMAZEMENT...THE NEWCOMER WAS ARMED TO THE TEETH.

I'M IN COMMAND...  
LUMME, YOU GOING TO TACKLE  
THE WHOLE GERMAN ARMY  
SINGLE-'ANDED?



CLIFFE'S THE NAME, LADDIE  
...LIEUTENANT IAN CLIFFE. BEEN POSTED  
TO 'F' TROOP AS GUN POSITION OFFICER.  
THINK WE SHALL GET ANY HAND-TO-  
HAND FIGHTING? THAT'S WHY I  
VOLUNTEERED FOR THIS SHOW!

THE HARD-BITTEN VETERAN EYED CLIFFE SARDONICALLY. HE HAD MET SELF-STYLED 'DEATH-OR-GLORY' TYPES BEFORE!

GLAD TO HAVE YOU WITH US, CLIFFE.  
BUT YOU'LL BE A DARNED SIGHT MORE  
USE TO ME IF YOU CONCENTRATE ON  
KEEPING THE GUNS IN ACTION...  
AND FORGET ABOUT  
WINNING A V.C.!



FOR THREE DAYS THE TROOPSHIP STEAMED UNMOLESTED ACROSS THE MEDITERRANEAN. BUT WITH EACH TURN OF THE SHIPS' SCREWS, THE COMING VIOLENT CONFLICT LOOMED LARGER IN THE MIND OF EVERY MAN IN THE CONVOY.



THE EXPEDITIONARY FORCE RECEIVED A DELIRIOUS WELCOME IN ATHENS . . .

ZITO INGLISIKA! DEATH  
TO ZE INVADER!  
ZITO!

ORIA  
INGLISIKA . . .  
S'AGHAPO!

ER . . . THANK YOU,  
MISS. WHAT'S SHE  
SAYING,  
BOMBARDIER?

HANDSOME  
ENGLISHMAN . . .  
I LOVE YOU, SIR?

BUT THE DELIGHTS OF ATHENS WERE  
SHORT-LIVED. A FEW DAYS LATER,  
THE GUNNERS FOUND THEMSELVES FIGHTING  
A BITTER, HOPELESS BATTLE IN THE  
MOUNTAINS OF GREECE.

ON  
TARGET!

BUT FOR EVERY ONE WE  
KNOCK OUT, TWO MORE  
COME IN! AND I RECKON  
THEY'VE GOT MORE  
TANKS THAN WE'VE  
GOT SHELLS!





FROM AN OBSERVATION POST HIGH IN THE MOUNTAINS, BILL RIDLEY AND TIM LEASON-JOYCE DIRECTED THE FIRE OF THE GUNS, AND WATCHED BITTERLY AS THE GERMAN BLITZKRIEG MOVED RELENTLESSLY FORWARD.

THE WHOLE AREA'S SWARMING WITH GERMANS... AND WE'RE LIMITED TO TEN ROUNDS PER DAY! WHAT CAN WE DO WITH TEN ROUNDS?



LOOK, SIR... THERE'S A LOT OF STUFF GOING DOWN THAT TRACK WHERE IT WINDS OUT OF OUR VIEW... BUT NOTHING COMES OUT AT THE OTHER END! THERE MUST BE A PRETTY BIG CONCENTRATION DOWN THERE! PERHAPS WE COULD...

YOU TRYING TO TEACH ME MY JOB AGAIN, BOMBARDIER? I'D NOTICED IT, ALL RIGHT... I'M GOING TO PUT OUT A FORWARD OBSERVATION POST AFTER DARK TONIGHT.



TIM STARED HOTLY AT HIS OFFICER. HE HAD NEVER REALISED IT WAS POSSIBLE TO HATE AND YET ADMIRE A MAN SO MUCH!

COMMAND POST... I WANT AN OFFICER SENT UP FOR FORWARD OBSERVATION... OF COURSE I WANT HIM RIGHT AWAY!



THE BULLYING OAF... HOW WAS I TO KNOW HE'D ALREADY SPOTTED IT!

JUST BEFORE DARK, THE SCRAPE OF BOOTS ON THE BOULDER-STREWN MOUNTAIN SLOPE ANNOUNCED THE APPROACH OF THE OFFICER BILL HAD REQUESTED. BILL'S JAW DROPPED WHEN HE SAW WHO IT WAS!

F.O.O. REPORTING, SIR! I VOLUNTEERED FOR THIS . . . SOUNDED JUST MY CUP OF TEA!

MMM . . . I HOPE YOU'RE RIGHT. WELL, HERE'S THE FORM. AS SOON AS IT'S DARK, YOU GO FORWARD . . .



AS BILL EXPLAINED THE JOB, CLIFFE'S FACE GREW SLIGHTLY PALE. HE MUST APPROACH TO THE VERY EDGE OF THE GERMAN POSITION . . . AND ORDER GUNFIRE WHEN THE SLIGHTEST MISCALCULATION COULD BRING THE SHELLS CRASHING DOWN ON HIMSELF.

IS THAT CLEAR, CLIFFE? REMEMBER, THE FIRE-ORDERS YOU GIVE MIGHT MEAN THE SMASHING OF THE GERMAN ADVANCE ON THIS FRONT! GOOD LUCK!

ER . . . TH . . . THANKS VERY MUCH!





CLIFFE STUMBLED AWAY INTO THE NIGHT, AND THE OTHERS SETTLED TO WAIT UNEASILY FOR HIS FIRST SIGNAL. AFTER WHAT SEEMED AN AGE, IT CAME . . .

C...CALLING O.P. . . I  
CAN SEE THE GERMAN  
POSITION . . . ONLY ABOUT  
A HUNDRED YARDS  
AWAY!

THEN START PASSING  
FIRE-ORDERS, MAN  
. . . WHAT ARE YOU  
WAITING FOR?



ALONE IN THE DARKNESS, CLIFFE'S BRAVADO  
DESERTED HIM . . . AND HE BROKE COMPLETELY.

IT'S NO GOOD, RIDLEY . . .  
I CAN'T DO IT.  
I CAN'T DO IT!



WITH A SNARL OF DISGUST, RIDLEY THREW  
DOWN THE HEADSET. FEAR HE COULD  
UNDERSTAND . . . BUT BY HIS CODE THIS  
WAS SHAMEFUL COWARDICE.

OUR POT-HUNTING HERO'S LOST  
HIS NERVE! I'M GOING OUT TO GET  
HIM IN . . . YOU'D BETTER COME WITH  
ME AND MAN THE FORWARD O.P.

RIGHT,  
SIR!



THE TWO MELTED INTO THE DARKNESS. ONCE MORE, TIM FOUND HIS DISLIKE OF RIDLEY SWAMPED BY ADMIRATION OF THE MASTERLY WAY IN WHICH THE REGULAR LOCATED THE WRETCHED CLIFFE . . .

HE SHOULD BE NEAR THAT CAIRN . . . IF HE'S HAD ENOUGH SENSE TO STAY PUT!

HE'S THERE, SIR, MISTER CLIFFE!



AT TIM'S STEALTHY WHISPER, CLIFFE LOST HIS HEAD COMPLETELY, AND LEAPED FROM COVER WITH A GLAD YELL . . .

THAT YOU, RIDLEY? THANK HEAVENS YOU'VE COME!

GET DOWN AND SHUT UP, YOU FOOL! YOU'LL BE HEARD . . .



BUT IT WAS TOO LATE. NEXT MOMENT, THE DARKNESS WAS SPLIT BY A BLINDING BEAM OF LIGHT, AND A VICIOUS BURST OF SCHEISSER FIRE RIPPED OVER THEIR HEADS.

ENGLANDERS . . . YOU ARE COMPLETELY SURROUNDED! SURRENDER!

AAOORGH! WE SURRENDER! KAMERAD! DON'T SHOOT!

SHALL WE MAKE A BREAK FOR IT, SIR?

IT WOULD BE SUICIDE NOW. WAIT TILL I GIVE THE WORD.





WITH CONTEMPTUOUS ARROGANCE, THE GERMAN PATROL DISARMED THE THREE AND PRODDED THEM DOWN THE TRACK . . .

MARCH, PIG . . .  
**SCHNELL!**

YOU ENGLISH NEVER  
LEARN! WE SHALL KICK  
YOU OUT OF GREECE  
AS WE KICKED YOU  
OUT OF FRANCE!

BUT YOU'LL  
FIND WE HAVE  
A HABIT OF  
COMING BACK!



AS THEY WERE SHEPHERDED DOWN THE MOUNTAINSIDE, BILL MUTTERED HIS PLAN TO THE OTHERS.

I'M GOING TO STUMBLE BY THIS NEXT ROCK

. . . YOU GO TO HELP ME . . . THEN  
WE'LL GET STUCK INTO THESE  
BERRIES, AND IT'S EVERY  
MAN FOR HIMSELF  
. . . OUCH!

SILENCE,  
PIG!



A FEW YARDS FARTHER ON, BILL GAVE A CONVINCING STUMBLE, AND THE OTHER TWO GRABBED HIM . . .

OW! MY ANKLE!

STEADY, SIR!



THE GUARDS CLOSED IN WARILY BUT BILL STRAIGHTENED UP... AND EXPLODED INTO ACTION.

NOW!

TAKE THAT!





CLIFFE SNATCHED UP A FALLEN SCHMEISSER AND BOLTED LIKE A SCARED RABBIT FOR THE UNDERGROWTH, LEAVING THE OTHER TWO FIGHTING LIKE TIGERS.

RIGHT . . .  
GET MOVING!

I'M  
WITH  
YOU!



THE NEAREST GERMANS WERE DOWN AND TIM AND BILL PLUNGED OFF THE TRACK AFTER CLIFFE. SUDDENLY . . .

CLIFFE . . .  
YOU CRAZY  
FOOL, WHAT  
ARE YOU  
DOING?

I'LL GET ONE  
OF THE SO-  
AND-SO'S!



BEFORE HE COULD BE PREVENTED, THE HYSTERICAL OFFICER HAD FIRED A BURST AT THE GERMANS WHO WERE STRUGGLING TO THEIR FEET.



BUT THE FOOLHARDY CLIFFE'S ACTION HAD DONE THE DAMAGE, AND A QUICK-WITTED GERMAN LOBBED A GRENADE TOWARDS THE SPOT WHERE HE HAD SEEN THE GUN FLASHES.





EVEN AS THE STICK GRENADE FELL TOWARDS THE GROUND, TIM THREW HIMSELF HEADLONG.



THEY'RE ONLY STUNNED, THANK GOODNESS! BUT THAT PATROL'S COMING... AND IF I STAY WITH THEM, I CAN'T DO ANY GOOD!



FROM A NEARBY HOLLOW, TIM GROUND HIS TEETH WITH HELPLESS RAGE AS HE SAW THE GERMANS BRUTALLY KICK THE TWO DAZED ENGLISHMEN TO THEIR FEET.

STAND UP, SCUM!

THERE WAS A THIRD ENGLANDER. WHERE IS HE?

HE WILL NOT GET FAR!



THE TWO LUCKLESS BRITISH OFFICERS WERE DRIVEN TOWARDS THE ENEMY COMMAND POST... AND THE GERMANS WERE TAKING NO CHANCES WITH A SECOND ESCAPE BID.

WHY ARE WE TAKING THEM BACK? THEY KILLED KLEIDEL... LET'S SHOOT THE DOGS NOW!

I'D LIKE NOTHING BETTER... BUT IT'S TOO GOOD FOR THEM. THERE'S A GESTAPO SECURITY OFFICER WITH THE COLONEL... HE WILL MAKE THEM PAY ALL RIGHT!



THE PRISONERS WERE PRODDED INTO THE KITCHEN OF A FARMHOUSE WHICH WAS THE GERMAN COMMANDANT'S H.Q. A PRUSSIAN-LOOKING COLONEL QUESTIONED THEM...

TWO ENGLISH PRISONERS, HERR COLONEL! DURING AN ATTEMPT AT ESCAPE, THEY SHOT ONE OF MY MEN... **IN COLD BLOOD!**

SO! WHAT HAF YOU TO SAY?

IT'S THE DUTY OF EVERY PRISONER TO ATTEMPT TO ESCAPE, SIR!





THE COLONEL'S COLD GREY EYES RAKED BILL RIDLEY CONTEMPTUOUSLY.

AND TO MURDER HIS GUARDS? IS THAT PART OF THE ENGLISH SOLDIER'S DUTY?



BILL BIT HIS LIP FOR HE KNEW THAT THE SHOOTING, IF NOT IN COLD BLOOD, HAD BEEN COMPLETELY NEEDLESS. THEN, AT THE COLONEL'S NEXT WORDS, HIS EYES WIDENED . . .

EVEN IF YOU HAD SUCCEEDED IN ESCAPING, IT WOULD HAVE BEEN FOR A FEW DAYS ONLY! FOR THE WHOLE BRITISH ARMY WILL BE PRISONERS SOON.



WITH ARROGANT SELF-CONFIDENCE, THE GERMAN HAD NO HESITATION IN TELLING THE TWO PRISONERS OF THE FATE THAT AWAITED THE BRITISH ARMY.

WHY DO YOU THINK WE HAVE BEEN CONCENTRATING IN THIS AREA? WHILE THE BRITISH ARE FIGHTING FOR THEIR LIVES HERE, WE SHALL THRUST DOWN THROUGH THE NEXT VALLEY AND SURROUND THEM COMPLETELY.

GOOD GRIEF! THEY COULD DO IT, TOO!



THE GESTAPO SECURITY OFFICER STEPPED FORWARD WITH INSOLENT AUTHORITY . . .

I THINK WE CAN DISPENSE WITH THE LECTURE ON MILITARY STRATEGY, HERR COLONEL. IF A MERE GESTAPO OFFICIAL MAY INTRUDE, I SUGGEST YOU HAVE THESE TWO SHOT AT ONCE!

I AM IN COMMAND HERE, HERR HENKEL . . . AND THESE ARE MY PRISONERS! THEY SHALL LEARN THAT THE GERMAN ARMY KNOWS . . . AND KEEPS TO THE RULES OF WAR!

THE GESTAPO MAN'S FACE DARKENED AT THE SNUB. BUT HE WAS DETERMINED TO EXTRACT SOME SADISTIC PLEASURE FROM THE PRISONERS.

ONLY ONE OF THEM COMMITTED THE MURDER . . . SO ONLY ONE OF THEM SHALL PAY FOR IT!

AH, YES . . . IT WILL BE INTERESTING TO FIND OUT WHICH OF THEM IT WAS. I WILL CONDUCT THE QUESTIONING!



WAIT... I HAVE AN IDEA. THE STUPID ENGLANDERS WILL NEVER BETRAY EACH OTHER, OF COURSE. SO WE WILL LET THE TWO PRISONERS DECIDE WHICH OF THEM IS TO DIE AT DAWN! THEY SHOULD HAVE A MOST ENJOYABLE NIGHT! ANY OBJECTIONS, HERR COLONEL?

I DO NOT LIKE IT... BUT I CANNOT STOP YOU!



THE TWO PRISONERS WERE THRUST INTO A TINY, THICK-WALLED ROOM. AS HE LEFT, THE GESTAPO MAN THREW THEM A PARTING SNEER.

IF YOU CANNOT PERSUADE THE MURDERER TO ADMIT HIS GUILT, I SUGGEST YOU TOSS FOR IT. SLEEP WELL, GENTLEMEN!



WITH THE MOCKING LAUGHTER OF THE GESTAPO MAN RINGING IN THEIR EARS, RIDLEY AND CLIFFE STARED AT EACH OTHER BLANKLY.

WELL, IT LOOKS LIKE CURTAINS FOR ONE OF US, CHUM! QUESTION IS, WHO'S IT GOING TO BE?



HYSTERICALLY, CLIFFE CLUTCHED AT THE LAPELS OF BILL'S BATTLE DRESS . . .

I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE THINKING . . . THAT IT'S ALL MY FAULT AND I'LL HAVE TO DIE! BUT I WON'T DIE! I TELL YOU . . . I WON'T!

GET A GRIP OF YOURSELF, CLIFFE, FOR PITY'S SAKE!



BILL SHOOK THE YOUNG OFFICER AS IF HE WERE A CHILD AND CLIFFE COLLAPSED ON TO THE BENCH; HIS SHOULDERS HEAVING WITH SHUDDERING SOBS .

OF COURSE IT'S ALL YOUR FAULT. BUT THERE'S MORE TO IT THAN THAT . . .





THERE WAS PITY IN BILL'S EYES AS HE GROPED FOR THE WORDS WHICH WOULD EXPLAIN TO CLIFFE WHY HE HAD TO DIE.

YOU HEARD WHAT THAT HUN COLONEL SAID ABOUT SURROUNDING THE BRITISH ARMY? WHICHEVER OF US IS LEFT ALIVE HAS SOMEHOW GOT TO ESCAPE . . . AND GET THAT GEN BACK! AND I KNOW YOU AREN'T MAN ENOUGH TO DO IT, CLIFFE!



THE COWARD LEAPED TO HIS FEET, HIS FACE AN AGONISED MASK OF FEAR.

YOU CAN'T SEND ME TO DIE, RIDLEY! I'VE GOT A WIFE AND CHILD . . . AND YOU'RE SINGLE. FOR MY FAMILY'S SAKE . . . THINK OF THEM!

THAT GESTAPO BLOKE CERTAINLY KNOWS REFINED WAYS OF TORTURE. WHAT A MESS!



ALL RIGHT, CLIFFE . . . LEAVE ME ALONE . . . I'VE GOT TO WORK THIS OUT!

IN MENTAL AGONY, RIDLEY WRESTLED WITH THE TOUGHEST PROBLEM A MAN COULD HAVE. HE KNEW IT WAS HIS MILITARY DUTY TO REMAIN ALIVE, ESCAPE AND GET THROUGH THE LINES WITH HIS VITAL NEWS . . . **BUT . . .**



I CAN'T DO IT . . . I CAN'T CONDEMN HIM TO DEATH! BUT IF I DON'T, THE ENTIRE BRITISH ARMY'S DOOMED!

# Chapter 4. GUNFIRE TARGET

MEANWHILE, TIM LEASON-JOYCE HAD MANAGED TO EVADE HIS HUNTERS.

I SEEM TO HAVE GIVEN THE JERRIES THE SLIP . . . BUT I'M NOT GOING BACK TILL I'VE HAD A CRACK AT FREEING THE OTHERS! THIS GREEK CHAP MAY BE ABLE TO HELP.



THE OLD GREEK PEASANT'S EYES LIT WHEN HE REALISED THAT TIM WAS BRITISH, AND HE GLADLY AGREED TO HELP HIM . . . ANYTHING TO STRIKE AT THE HATED GERMAN INVADER!

MANY THANKS MY FRIEND!



IT IS NOTHING! TURN THE DONKEY LOOSE WHEN YOU HAVE FINISHED WITH HER SHE WILL FIND HER WAY HOME!



WITH HIS RADIO SAFELY HIDDEN BENEATH THE BRUSHWOOD ON THE DONKEY, TIM BOLDLY SET OFF TOWARDS THE GERMAN AREA. THEN HIS HEART MISSED A BEAT AS HE HEARD THE CLICK OF A RIFLE BOLT. TWO HELMETED GERMANS STEPPED FROM THE SHADOWS AT THE ROADSIDE.

JUST WHAT WE NEED FOR THE GUARDROOM... A LOAD OF FIREWOOD?

I AM SORRY, I WAS ORDERED TO COLLECT THIS FOR YOUR COMMANDANT'S FIRE!

ACH... JUST OUR LUCK! ON YOUR WAY, SCUM!



IN A GROVE OF OLIVES NEAR THE FARMHOUSE WHICH WAS THE GERMAN H.Q., TIM TETHERED THE DONKEY AND INCHED HIS WAY FORWARD. HE SAW A SENTRY PACING TO AND FRO OUTSIDE A BARRED WINDOW... AND INSIDE, BY THE FEEBLE GLEAM OF AN OIL LAMP, RECOGNISED THE HAGGARD FEATURES OF RIDLEY!



SO THAT'S WHERE THEY ARE... WAITING FOR A FIRING SQUAD, I EXPECT. I'LL NEVER BE ABLE TO RUSH THAT GUARD ACROSS THE OPEN SPACE AND BY THE SOUNDS OF IT THE GUARDROOM IS JUST AROUND THE CORNER...

BY THE LIGHT OF THE MOON, THE BOMBARDIER BEGAN TO PIN-POINT ON HIS MAP THE EXACT POSITION OF THE FARMHOUSE . . .

THERE IS ONLY ONE THING FOR IT! I'LL LAY ON A SHOOT FOR A DIRECT HIT ON THE PLACE . . . IT MAY WELL KILL THEM BOTH — BUT IT IS THEIR ONLY CHANCE OF ESCAPE!



HE SWITCHED ON HIS SET AND IN A VOICE THAT WAS LITTLE MORE THAN A WHISPER, BEGAN TO PASS HIS FIRE-ORDERS . . .

PIN-POINT  
TARGET.  
POSITION . . .



AFTER WHAT SEEMED AN AGE TO TIM, THE LACONIC WORD 'SHOT!' CAME OVER THE AIR. HE WAITED BREATHLESSLY FOR THE SHELL TO LAND. UNLESS IT DROPPED REASONABLY CLOSE, HE WOULD HAVE NO MEANS OF CORRECTING THE RANGE. THERE WAS A SHRIEK AND AN EAR-SPLITTING ROAR . . .





THE NEXT SHELL CRASHED HOME ON THE FARMHOUSE. THE WALL SEEMED TO HEAVE . . . THEN CRACKED AND FELL. OUT STAGGERED TWO DUST-COVERED, CHOKING FIGURES . . .

W...WHAT'S  
HAPPENED?

A BLOOMIN'  
MIRACLE,  
I THINK!

RIDLEY...  
CLIFFE...  
THIS WAY!

EVEN AS THE OFFICERS STUMBLED  
UNBELIEVINGLY TOWARDS HIM, DAZED  
GERMANS WERE BEGINNING TO APPEAR  
AMONGST THE RUINS.

LEASON - JOYCE . . .  
HOW DID YOU . . .

NO TIME FOR  
ADVENTURE STORIES, SIR...  
ALL HADES IS GOING  
TO BREAK LOOSE AT ANY  
MOMENT. LET'S GO!

THE FIRST SHELLS OF THE SALVO BEGAN TO RAIN DOWN ON THE AREA AS THE THREE BRITONS RACED DESPERATELY FOR FREEDOM.

THAT OUGHT TO KEEP THE JERRIES' HEADS DOWN!

I NEVER THOUGHT I'D ENJOY BEING SHELLED BY MY OWN GUNS!



SUDDENLY THEIR HOPES WERE DASHED. AHEAD, THE ROAD FELL AWAY INTO A STEEP RAVINE ON ONE SIDE WITH AN UNCLIMBABLE CLIFF-FACE ON THE OTHER. AN ARMED SENTRY PACED ALERTLY IN THE ROADWAY.

THAT'S TORN IT... HOW ARE WE GOING TO GET PAST HIM?

LEAVE IT TO ME!





BILL AND TIM LOOKED AT THE YOUNG OFFICER IN SURPRISE. THERE WAS A NEW CONFIDENCE AND STEADINESS IN CLIFFE'S MANNER. GONE WAS THE SWAGGERING BRAVADO . . . GONE, TOO, WAS THE PITIFUL COWARD. IN SOME STRANGE WAY, LIEUTENANT CLIFFE HAD FOUND HIS MANHOOD!

I'VE DONE A BIT OF DEER-STALKING.  
I CAN CREEP ALONG THIS DITCH  
AND TAKE CARE OF HIM!

YE-ES...  
THIS TIME I  
BELIEVE YOU.  
GOOD LUCK,  
CLIFFE!



BREATHLESSLY, THE TWO WATCHED CLIFFE SLITHER  
SOUNDLESSLY ALONG THE SHALLOW DITCH.

WHAT DO YOU MAKE OF  
THAT? WITHOUT TURNING A  
HAIR . . . AND YET . . .

BEATS ME! YOU  
CAN NEVER TELL  
WHAT MAKES A  
BLOKE TICK!



CLIFFE WAS ONLY TEN FEET FROM THE SENTRY... THEN SOME SIXTH SENSE MADE THE GERMAN TURN. THE OFFICER LEAPED DESPERATELY BUT THE SENTRY'S FINGER WAS ON THE TRIGGER...

AAARGH!



HIT IN THE CHEST, CLIFFE HALTED, STAGGERED, AND CAME ON. THE GERMAN FIRED AGAIN... BUT STILL CLIFFE LURCHED DOGGEDLY ON ANOTHER YARD ONLY TO FALL AT THE GERMAN'S FEET. GATHERING HIS EBING STRENGTH FOR ONE LAST SUPREME EFFORT, THE YOUNG OFFICER GRABBED AT THE SENTRY'S JACKBOOTS...

UNBALANCED, THE SENTRY TOPPLED OVER THE EDGE OF THE ROAD... AND THE WAY WAS CLEAR!







THE TWO MEN ROSE TO THEIR FEET AND STOOD FOR A MOMENT IN SILENT TRIBUTE. THEN THEY STARTED ON THE LAST WEARY MILE TO THE BRITISH LINES . . . AND FREEDOM.



BILL RIDLEY MADE HIS REPORT TO THE DIVISIONAL COMMANDER, AND ORDERS WERE HASTILY GIVEN TO COUNTERACT THE GERMAN THREAT.



AS THE BRIGADIER MOVED AWAY, THE REGULAR AND THE PUBLIC SCHOOLBOY TURNED TO FACE EACH OTHER. THERE WAS A NEW LIGHT IN THEIR EYES. FOR THE FIRST TIME, THEY HAD COME TO APPRECIATE EACH OTHER'S WORTH.

REMEMBER IN THE DESERT, WE ARRANGED TO MEET, MAN TO MAN? I RECKON WE HAVE, TIM . . . SHAKE!

I'M PROUD TO . . . BILL!



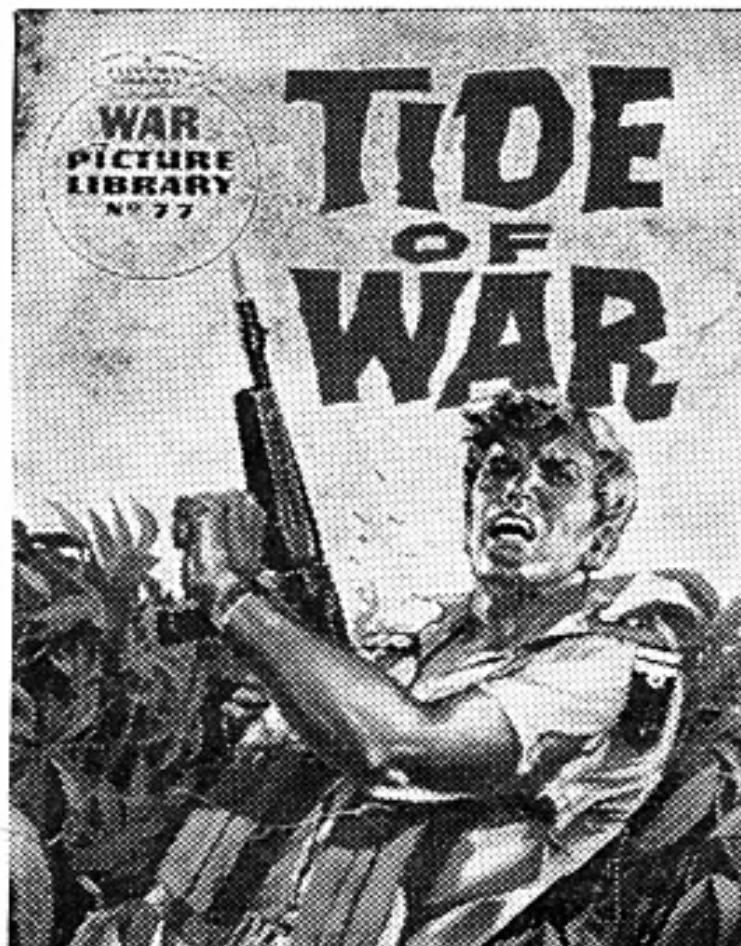


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